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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Friday, December 17, 1937

(FOR BROADCAST USE ONLY)

Subject: "IF YOU'RE MAKING A FRUIT CAKE". Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. Department of Agriculture.

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You don't have to be a Pollyanna to be glad at this time of year. Friendly candles in windows---lights twinkling on evergreens--carolers singing outside---all help you forget your worries. They remind you that simple, homey things are what make Christmas the happy season it is.

One of the very best things of all about these days before Christmas is the atmosphere around home. I've found that walking about the house actually is an adventure. I've learned to knock on any closed door before entering a room. For inside some member of my family may be wrapping a surprise present.

You've probably noticed that closets aren't just places to hang clothes or store linens any more. They are sub-stations for Santa Claus. And I am a bit cautious when I intrude on the dolls, sleds, and other toys staying there.

Even the most down-to-earth room in the house is touched by the pre-Christmas magic. For that's where fruit cakes are made. And a fruit cake is a part of any winter holiday.

Of course you know that age improves the flavor of a fruit cake. It takes time for the spices, and fruit, and nuts to blend together. However, there is time yet to make your Christmas cake. You'll want some for the New Year's holiday also. And you can keep it for special occasions later on.

If you make a white cake it won't take so long for the ingredients to "get used to each other". In a white cake there are no spices. And the nuts and fruit are the lighter kinds. Sometimes the recipe calls for candied cherries or candied cranberries. These contrast with the light cake and give it a holiday appearance.

Whether you make a dark or a light fruit cake two parts of the manufacture are most important--the preparation of the fruit and the baking. You'll serve the cake in small, thin slices. Therefore any little defect in the cake will show up.

Look over the fruit and nuts with your most suspicious eyes. See that little stem ends of raisins don't get left in. Watch for stray shells of nuts. Then when you are absolutely sure that there is no foreign matter there, chop the nuts and cut up the fruit.



As nearly as possible cut the fruit in small uniform pieces. Candied cranberries and cherries are the exception to this rule. You may leave them whole. Then before you combine these nuts and fruit with the rest of the ingredients mix them with part of the flour. The flour will separate the small pieces from each other. But don't let the flour collect in streaks or settle in the wrinkles of the raisins. That'll show up in the finished cake also.

Now after you've taken the trouble to prepare all the fruit and nuts and have mixed the cake, be sure that you bake it carefully. Here you have two special problems. First the fruit and the sugar are a large part of the cake. It is easy to scorch them.

So put a greased paper in the cake pan and bake the cake at a low temperature. The greased paper will keep the pieces of fruit from coming in contact with the hot pan.

The other problem in baking a fruit cake is getting heat to penetrate through the whole mixture. You have a thick batter crowded with nuts and fruit. In an ordinary cake pan the outside of the cake may get done before the inside has even started to cook.

So it's better to bake a fruit cake in a tube pan. The tube lets the heat come up and get right to the center of the cake from the beginning of the baking.

After your cake is done, let it cool completely. Then wrap it in a waxed paper and store it in a tin box. I know one woman who always puts a cut apple in the box with the cake to keep it fresh. Of course she has to watch the apple and replace it once in a while.

Watch the fruit cake to see that it doesn't mold or dry out. If it does mold, scrape off the moldy portion. Then wipe the surface of the whole cake with alcohol or brandy and wrap it in a fresh cover.

If your cake becomes dry, serve it as a plum pudding. Steam pieces of it and serve with a moist sauce.

Above all remember when you start to make your fruit cake that patience is a major virtue. It'll take time to prepare the fruit properly. It'll take time to bake the cake at a low temperature. And it'll take even longer for the ingredients to blend in with each other. The last is a matter of weeks.

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